United Nations A/72/751

General Assembly

Distr.: General
15 February 2018

Original: English

Seventy-second session
Agenda item 131
Sexual exploitation and abuse: implementing a zero-tolerance policy

Special measures for protection from sexual exploitation and abuse

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The present report has been prepared pursuant to General Assembly resolutions 71/278 and 71/297. It provides information on measures to strengthen the system-wide response to sexual exploitation and abuse, including progress in the implementation of the zero-tolerance policy and the Secretary-General's "new approach" strategy, which was outlined in the previous report (A/71/818 and A/71/818/Corr.1). Additional information on allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse relating to personnel in peacekeeping and special political missions, other United Nations entities and non-United Nations international forces authorized by a Security Council mandate (covering the period from 1 January to 31 December 2017) is available online.[a]

[a] The additional information is available for the reference of the General Assembly in its deliberations at https://delegate.un.int/dgacm/delegate.nsf/xaOpenPortal.xsp.

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I. Introduction

1. I have repeatedly affirmed that sexual exploitation and abuse will not be tolerated by the United Nations. Last year, I laid out a comprehensive strategy to transform the way in which we collectively view, seek to prevent and respond to sexual exploitation and abuse (see A/71/818 and A/71/818/Corr.1). That strategy is bearing fruit. Significant efforts have been made in partnership with Member States and other stakeholders. Nevertheless, incidents of sexual exploitation and abuse continue to occur, causing damage and distress to the people we have pledged to protect.

2. Sexual exploitation and abuse are not reflective of the conduct of the majority of the dedicated women and men who serve in the United Nations. But every allegation involving our personnel undermines the Organization's values and principles and the sacrifice of those who serve with pride and professionalism in some of the most dangerous places. It also diverts attention and resources from efforts to maintain peace and security, promote and protect human rights, provide humanitarian assistance and realize the Sustainable Development Goals.

3. No individual serving under the United Nations flag should be associated with sexual exploitation and abuse. Combating this scourge continues to be one of my key priorities for 2018, as is assisting and empowering those who have been scarred by these egregious acts.

4. Recent allegations involving humanitarian and civil society actors show that sexual exploitation and abuse are not unique to the United Nations and that no institution is immune. I am committed to building on what has been achieved to make the United Nations a global example of best practice and leadership to be followed by all, for the greater good of those we serve and of our Organization.

II. Overview: system-wide response to sexual exploitation and abuse — realizing a cultural change

5. In January 2017, I established a high-level task force and tasked it with developing ambitious proposals to improve the system-wide approach to preventing and responding to sexual exploitation and abuse. Those proposals informed the strategy set out in my report to the General Assembly at its seventy-first session (A/71/818 and A/71/818/Corr.1), which focuses on four areas of action: putting the rights and dignity of victims first; ending impunity; engaging civil society and external partners; and improving strategic communications for education and transparency.

6. Building on the existing zero-tolerance policy, my strategy is aimed at bringing about a cultural and operational change to improve dramatically how the United Nations addresses sexual exploitation and abuse and to renew a sense of purpose and pride in service. The implementation of the strategy necessarily depends upon strong cooperation across the system, including among the Secretariat and the agencies, funds and programmes, and robust partnership and engagement with Member States, civil society and other stakeholders.

7. The Special Coordinator on Improving the United Nations Response to Sexual Exploitation and Abuse, reporting to me through my Chef de Cabinet, drives these efforts, by aligning approaches, enhancing inter-agency coordination and cooperation and implementing system-wide initiatives designed to prevent and respond more effectively to sexual exploitation and abuse and to avoid fragmentation and gaps. Such action includes awareness-raising regarding prohibited behaviour, mapping the

roles and responsibilities of actors through an accountability framework, improving data collection and reporting and coordinating the development of personnel screening mechanisms. The role of the Special Coordinator will ensure coherence and sustained attention to the implementation of my strategy and continue the momentum of initiatives under way.

8. Transforming our organizational culture requires strengthened leadership and accountability at all levels, through the implementation of unified policies and programmes that underscore zero tolerance and clarify the individual responsibility of those serving under the United Nations flag.

9. I have stressed the individual reporting obligations of all categories of United Nations personnel. The Department of Field Support underscored these obligations in communications to all field mission personnel, stressing that failure to comply may, in itself, constitute misconduct. I actively enforce the policy on the protection of staff who report misconduct or cooperate with an investigation (ST/SGB/2017/2/Rev.1). Often referred to as the "whistle-blower protection policy", protection against retaliation applies to all staff members, interns and United Nations Volunteers, individual contractors and consultants. Full implementation of the policy is essential for empowering staff and encouraging them to report misconduct, including in cases involving senior officials.

10. In order to sustain senior-level engagement, my Chef de Cabinet convenes quarterly meetings of the High-level Steering Group on preventing sexual exploitation and abuse, the membership of which comprises representatives of relevant entities.[1] The work of the Steering Group is supported by a bimonthly working group on sexual exploitation and abuse chaired by the Office of the Special Coordinator. Additional areas of focus include the risks of sexual exploitation and abuse by United Nations implementing partners,[2] and linkages among gender and sexual exploitation and abuse.

11. With a view to underscoring senior-level accountability, I instructed senior leadership across the system to develop strategies and country action plans. A total of

[1] The High-level Steering Group comprises representatives of the Department of Field Support, the Department of Management, the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, the Department of Political Affairs, the Department of Public Information, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, the Office of Legal Affairs, the Offices of the Special Coordinator on Improving the United Nations Response to Sexual Exploitation and Abuse and of the Victims' Rights Advocate, the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict, the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR); as well as the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA).

[2] Implementing partners implement programme activities of United Nations system entities through formal agreements and are allocated resources (funds and materials) to enable programme delivery. They include government institutions, intergovernmental organizations and civil society organizations.

34 entities[3] have provided plans that include measures for risk mitigation, community engagement and the reporting of complaints, as well as for outreach to, and the protection of, victims, witnesses and family members. Plans also seek to promote a victim-centred approach, with staff specifically designated to receive complaints and provide assistance and protection. Many incorporate provisions for unannounced field visits, mandatory training prior to deployment for all categories of personnel and for the placement of staff on administrative leave without pay during investigations and/or disciplinary proceedings. Several include proposals to improve gender parity in recruitment.

12. There are good practice examples of leadership commitment. The Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees addressed their staff, stressing their obligation to comply with standards of conduct and reiterating the policy of zero tolerance for acts of sexual exploitation and abuse. Within the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA), the senior leadership sets a strong tone at a weekly Force Commander's meeting and at a monthly meeting wherein sector commanders report on prevention, training and response.

13. Effective January 2018, senior managers system-wide are required to submit annual certifications to their respective governing bodies that all credible allegations related to United Nations staff and affiliated personnel have been fully and accurately reported. Certification is required regarding the provision of training on the prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse and reporting allegations. In addition, in accordance with specific provisions in the new administrative instruction on disciplinary procedures of 26 October 2017, the Secretariat may place staff members on administrative leave without pay where there are reasonable grounds to believe that they have engaged in sexual exploitation and abuse (see ST/AI/2017/1).

14. All staff members will be required to sign a written attestation of commitment to the Charter of the United Nations, including their compliance with rules prohibiting sexual exploitation and abuse and requiring the reporting of allegations. The attestation must be signed: (a) upon entry into service in the Secretariat;[4] (b) annually; and (c) upon reassignment. A special notice has been formulated for all future vacancy

[3] The Department for General Assembly and Conference Management, the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, the Department of Field Support, the Department of Management, the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, the Department of Political Affairs, the Department of Public Information, the Department of Safety and Security, the Office for Disarmament Affairs, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS), the Office of Legal Affairs, the Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States, the Office of the Special Adviser on Africa, the Office of the Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict, the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, the Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect, OHCHR, the United Nations Office at Geneva and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime; the Economic Commission for Africa, the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean and the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, as well as UNHCR, UNICEF, the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, UNDP, the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), the United Nations Environment Programme, the United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS), UNFPA, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) and the World Food Programme (WFP).

[4] The document mirrors the individual attestations required by experts on mission serving as United Nations police and the certifications provided by Member States that deploy troops or formed police units.

announcements and hiring letters concerning the values and standards of conduct required of staff and the consequences of violations.

15. The fifth Leadership Dialogue, a mandatory discussion for managers and staff throughout the Secretariat, focused on the responsibilities of United Nations staff, including in preventing and reporting sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment. The programme concluded in December 2017; certifications of completion were due in January 2018. Also, at my request, in 2017 the Ethics Office conducted a review of the existing regulatory frameworks on the relationship between sexual harassment in the United Nations workplace and sexual exploitation and abuse in the field (see A/71/818, para. 17).

III. Implementation of the zero-tolerance policy

16. The General Assembly has stressed that prevention and accountability are critical areas in which the United Nations and Member States must demonstrate their collective commitment to zero-tolerance for sexual exploitation and abuse and to providing justice for victims (see resolution 71/278). Prevention and accountability are at the core of my strategy to implement the zero-tolerance policy, as are related measures to raise awareness, conduct risk assessment and to improve screening and staff training, as well as reporting. Section III provides a snapshot of the measures taken system-wide to enforce zero tolerance, the results achieved and the next steps in the light of challenges encountered.

17. During the reporting period, the "no excuses" card, which outlines the responsibilities and obligations with regard to preventing and reporting sexual exploitation and abuse, was distributed in the six official languages, as well as local and other languages, to all United Nations entities with a field presence. UNDP shared the card and other informational material with its staff. The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) revised internal procedures and codes of conduct to increase the awareness of reporting obligations, while briefing its staff and conducting outreach to the human rights mechanisms.

18. In August 2017, the Office of the Special Coordinator launched the second system-wide survey for United Nations and affiliated personnel at 30 duty stations with humanitarian and/or peace operations.[5] It aimed to assess, inter alia, staff members' knowledge of the code of conduct and the training they had received during the past 12 months, as well as their knowledge of reporting and/or referral procedures and of the consequences of engaging in sexual exploitation and abuse. More than 6,000 respondents among all categories of personnel from more than 10 entities,[6] including the Secretariat,[7] completed the survey. The results demonstrated that most members of personnel were aware of the rules and their responsibilities to report. Training received was considered effective, and a one-to-one correlation between training received and knowledge of the rules was discerned. However, the results indicated that more effective systems for the reporting of allegations were needed, along with greater oversight by senior leadership and more outreach to staff on how

[5] Afghanistan, Burundi, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Colombia, Côte d'Ivoire, Cyprus, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, Gabon, Guinea-Bissau, Haiti, India, Iraq, Kenya, Kuwait, Lebanon, Liberia, Libya, Mali, Nigeria, Pakistan, Sudan, Somalia, South Sudan, Syrian Arab Republic, Turkmenistan and Yemen, as well as Gaza and Kosovo (references to Kosovo shall be understood to be in the context of Security Council resolution 1244 (1999)).

[6] UNDP, UNFPA, UNHCR, UNICEF, UNOPS, UNRWA, the United Nations Volunteers programme (UNV), UN-Women and WFP, "other", where no affiliation was specified.

[7] For the purposes of the present report, the Secretariat includes all peacekeeping and special political missions.

to report. The results provide a basis for the development of additional preventive or remedial measures and for measuring improvements.

A. Mitigating risks

19. On the basis of the action plans referred to in paragraph 11 above, I instructed the senior managers of all entities with operations and programmes in the field to undertake risk assessments and propose mitigation measures, and to report to me in 2018 on where the greatest challenges remain for mitigating risks in their operations and where they have been able to make a positive impact. The determination of measures required to mitigate risk factors comprehensively depends on the context of the specific field operation, based on a situational analysis and assessment of risk factors, their likelihood and impact, so that targeted internal controls can be used to prioritize and address those risks. Internal controls implemented in peace operations include curfews, the imposition of off-limits locations, assessment visits to remote duty stations, recurrent awareness-raising among personnel and outreach to local communities on the standards of conduct expected of United Nations personnel.

20. The Department of Field Support developed a sexual exploitation and abuse risk-management toolkit, adaptable to specific mission conditions, aligned with other risk management processes for peace operations. The toolkit will be piloted in the first half of 2018; finalization is envisaged for later in the year, and the product will be shared system-wide. In order to further mitigate risk, the Department communicated to all field mission personnel the clear prohibition of any sexual relationship with members of at-risk populations, such as refugees and internally displaced persons, who fall under United Nations protection mandates.

21. As another risk mitigation measure, a study is being prepared by the working group on sexual exploitation and abuse to analyse the causes and consequences of sexual exploitation and abuse from a gender perspective, so as to inform the development of strategies and responses to advance the Organization's broader goals on women's human rights, gender equality and women's empowerment. I also instructed the working group to develop a comprehensive protocol on preventing and addressing allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse for implementing partners, in partnership with the Inter-Agency Standing Committee Task Team on Accountability to Affected Populations and Prevention of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse, which is led by the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). The protocol outlines requirements to put in place safeguards for prevention and response, such as training and capacity development, risk assessment and mitigation and the monitoring and reporting of allegations. It will be finalized and rolled out in 2018.

B. Screening

22. An electronic tool for screening United Nations personnel dismissed as a result of substantiated allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse, or who resigned during an investigation, is expected to become operational this year. The goal of the tool is to prevent such individuals from being reemployed within the United Nations system, and it will be used across the Secretariat and its separately administered agencies, funds and programmes.

23. The Secretariat has aligned its human resources requirements with the policy on human rights screening of United Nations personnel, of 2012. The policy requires that: (a) States that nominate or provide personnel to serve with the United Nations screen and certify that such personnel have not, nor are alleged to have, committed

criminal offences and/or violations of international human rights and international humanitarian law; (b) individuals seeking to serve with the United Nations submit self-attestations; and (c) the Secretariat review available information on the human rights conduct of candidates and/or nominees. Owing to limited capacity, the Secretariat is generally able to conduct human rights screening only for candidates for senior positions. I will continue to explore how the necessary resources can be made available to screen all personnel. I call on the support and cooperation of Member States to ensure that personnel are screened prior to their nomination or deployment so that United Nations standards are upheld.

C. Training

24. The Department of Field Support developed an e-learning training programme on the prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse, which was made mandatory for all Secretariat personnel in May 2017 and has been completed by over 14,000 personnel at Headquarters and in mission locations. In August 2017, UNICEF, UNDP, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), UNFPA and the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) adapted the e-learning programme for all staff and related personnel working with agencies, funds and programmes. The training has also been made available to UNICEF implementing partners. Several country offices have accelerated training requirements in high-risk contexts, for example, prior to the deployment in Bangladesh as part of the humanitarian response to the Rohingya refugee crisis. I encourage Member States to incorporate similar programmes in predeployment training, including through joint learning initiatives in peacekeeping and other training centres.

IV. Implementation of the Secretary-General's new approach strategy

A. Prioritizing the rights of victims

25. Prioritizing the rights and dignity of victims of sexual exploitation and abuse is at the heart of my strategy, and cuts across its other elements. Over the past year, I met personally with victims of sexual exploitation and abuse, including during my visit to the Central African Republic in October 2017. I was profoundly moved by these encounters and inspired by the courage and resilience with which victims and survivors are rebuilding their lives. I will continue to interact with victims throughout my mandate, to hear about their needs, concerns and priorities and to reaffirm the commitment of the United Nations to stand alongside them, provide them with assistance and uphold their rights.

1. Victims' Rights Advocate and Field Victims' Rights Advocates

26. In August 2017, I appointed the first-ever Victims' Rights Advocate to strengthen the support the United Nations gives to victims and ensure that a victim-centred approach is integrated into prevention and response, including access to

justice.[8] In order to bolster the provision of support to victims at the field level, I instructed my special representatives in the four peacekeeping operations in which the highest number of allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse had been reported (MINUSCA, United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO), United Nations Mission for Justice Support in Haiti (MINUJUSTH and United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS)) to establish a post of Field Victims' Rights Advocate at the mid-to-senior level. The Field Victims' Rights Advocates assumed this role in addition to their existing functions, with a dual reporting line to the relevant Special Representative and the Victims' Rights Advocate. Their role is to ensure that a victim-centred, gender- and child-sensitive and non-discriminatory approach is integrated into all activities to support and assist victims and is aligned system-wide in the specified duty stations.

27. Since assuming office in September 2017, the Victims' Rights Advocate has engaged with Member States, United Nations system entities and civil society, including academia, at Headquarters and in the field to gather best practices of victim-centred responses and community engagement to mitigate risks, and to identify areas for further action. In order to gain practical insights on best practices, she visited the Central African Republic in October 2017 and South Sudan in December 2017. Supported by the Field Victims' Rights Advocates, she met a range of actors on the ground and accompanied me to meet victims in the Central African Republic. I was gratified by the commitment of Mission leadership to address sexual exploitation and abuse openly and clearly, including by strengthening accountability measures. The leadership in these missions set an example for the entire system, emphasizing how our behaviour must demonstrate strong values and principles. The efforts they have made to communicate and reach out to increase awareness of what is and should be expected of United Nations personnel should be commended and replicated across the system.

28. I instructed the Victims' Rights Advocate to undertake a comprehensive mapping of victims' rights approaches and services available system-wide, in order to build on the work already undertaken in this area, and to provide a clear overview of gaps, overlaps, lessons learned and best practices. The holistic analysis will facilitate the development of recommendations to strengthen inter-agency cooperation on victims' assistance at the country level. I have also requested her to convene expert consultations, including with national-level victims' advocates and legal aid organizations, so as to inform the development of required additional tools, policies or programmes.

29. The work of the Field Victims' Rights Advocates has already had a positive impact. In the Central African Republic, the Advocate spearheaded greater collaboration between the United Nations and national actors to improve processes relating to paternity claims linked to sexual exploitation and abuse and participated in interdepartmental missions to two troop-contributing countries in order to discuss national-level measures to prevent and respond to such conduct and related paternity claims. In Haiti, the Advocate encouraged greater cooperation among United Nations system entities dealing with sexual exploitation and abuse and sought to integrate rights-based aspects of victims' assistance into Mission activities and those of different entities. In South Sudan, the Advocate is working to ensure that legal, medical, psychosocial and other basic support services are provided in a timely

[8] In its resolution 72/262, the General Assembly approved resources relating to the Office of the Victims' Rights Advocate for the period from 1 January to 31 December 2018. Revised estimates relating to the Office for 2019 will be submitted to the Assembly for its consideration later in 2018. Dedicated and specialized Field Victims' Rights Advocate posts are included in the proposed budgets for the relevant peacekeeping missions for consideration by the Assembly in 2018.

manner to victims. In addition to her regular functions, a staff member operates as a de facto victims' assistance focal point in a regional field location (Malakal, South Sudan), a good practice which should be considered for other settings. The efforts of these Advocates working in collaboration with key actors on the ground have increased the opportunities for victims to come forward and report allegations, particularly through better and more proactive outreach to communities and the establishment and reinforcement of community-based complaint mechanisms.

30. The Field Victims' Rights Advocates must be adequately resourced and supported, including through the creation of dedicated, specialized posts. Their work can be bolstered by the identification of victims' rights focal points in other regional field locations. I will also continue to request that relevant entities designate field victims' rights advocates in humanitarian and development contexts where the prevalence of sexual exploitation and abuse called for special measures.

2. Trust Fund in Support of Victims of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse

31. The Trust Fund in Support of Victims of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse, established in 2016, provides resources to support a range of victims' assistance services and projects. I welcome the threefold increase in contributions over the past year and encourage Member States to continue this positive momentum. As of December 2017, the Trust Fund held $1.89 million in commitments and/or contributions, $176,000 of which were payments withheld in connection with substantiated cases of sexual exploitation and abuse in accordance with General Assembly resolution 70/286. Grants have been made available to projects to provide specialized services for victims and strengthen community-based complaint reception networks in the Democratic Republic of Congo. In December 2017, an internal review committee on the Trust Fund, comprised of senior representatives from entities across the system, also approved projects in the Central African Republic, to provide medical, psychosocial and legal services to victims as part of existing gender-based violence programming, and in Liberia, to support education and vocational training for victims who have experienced marginalization and stigmatization.

3. Assistance and support to victims across the system

32. I am heartened by the measures taken by a number of United Nations system entities to provide assistance to victims as an integral part of their programmes and to strengthen coordinated responses. In 2017, UNICEF scaled up its response in 16 high-risk countries, including through strengthening the provision of child-sensitive assistance for victims. In September 2017, it convened a two-day consultation, during which progress in the coordination of investigations was noted, while the lack of availability of legal aid for victims was identified as a long-standing gap.

33. In the Central African Republic, a joint project involving police personnel and civilians, supported by UNDP and the Senior Women's Protection Adviser in MINUSCA, provides inquiry and investigation services, as well as medical, psychosocial, legal and preventive intervention services to the community in cases of gender-based violence, including sexual exploitation and abuse by United Nations personnel.

34. The Department of Field Support developed a guide on communicating with victims, from the receipt of a complaint to the outcome of an investigation. Templates of letters to be provided to victims at the end of an investigation, regardless of its outcome, have been designed so as to improve and standardize communication. A centralized tracking tool for victims' assistance in all peace operations is being developed and is to be rolled out in 2018, and the services available to victims are being mapped.

35. Different entities continued their work in a task force led by the Department of Field Support and UNICEF to finalize a uniform protocol on the provision of assistance to victims of sexual exploitation and abuse. The protocol, which aims to strengthen a coordinated system-wide approach and linkages among missions and country teams in the field, provides guidance on assistance and support to victims of sexual exploitation and abuse committed by staff and related personnel or by non-United Nations forces operating under a Security Council mandate. Since March 2017, it has been field-tested in the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Iraq and Mali. The protocol will clarify the roles and responsibilities of all actors, including the Victims' Rights Advocates at Headquarters and in the field, as well as the roles of Humanitarian and Resident Coordinators in establishing or maintaining networks on the prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse. It will also include measurable actions on victim assistance and encourage the appointment of focal points in humanitarian agencies. Training on the draft protocol was delivered by UNICEF and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) to over 300 focal points in Chad, Iraq, Lebanon, Malawi, Nigeria and Yemen.

B. Ending impunity

36. Impunity will persist without reporting being strengthened, investigations being conducted and action being taken by Member States directed towards holding individual perpetrators of alleged sexual exploitation and abuse to account. We must work in partnership with Member States to ensure that, in cases where their nationals have engaged in sexual exploitation and abuse, which constitute criminal offences and/or engage civil liability, there are appropriate and strong consequences. I will continue to do all in my power to ensure accountability within the United Nations, utilizing, as a point of reference, the system-wide matrix of responsibilities to prevent and respond to allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse (see A/71/818, annex V).

1. Improved reporting and data collection

37. Measures have been taken to harmonize, increase cooperation on and improve reporting and data collection methods for incidents of sexual exploitation and abuse across the system, and remain a priority for 2018. Since early 2017, all United Nations system entities have been required to report to me on allegations where there is sufficient information to identify a possible act of sexual exploitation or abuse involving an identified or identifiable victim. As an additional means of holding United Nations senior leadership accountable, the Office of the Special Coordinator provides me with a consolidated update on a quarterly basis of allegations received system-wide. Since November 2017, I have made such updates publicly available. The Department of Field Support continues to report and update data on allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse on its Conduct and Discipline website (https://conduct.unmissions.org/).

38. In November 2017, the High-level Steering Group endorsed a uniform policy on balancing the disclosure of information to national authorities with principles of confidentiality when receiving and handling allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse by persons acting under a United Nations mandate, allowing the Organization to manage the receipt and handling of information from, or about, victims in a way that balances their rights to privacy and confidentiality with the Organization's obligation to pursue accountability, including criminal accountability. The policy was prepared in response to recommendation 6 of the report of the external independent review panel on sexual exploitation and abuse by international peacekeeping forces in the Central African Republic (see A/71/99), and informed by an assessment of

policies on confidentiality in 18 entities and extensive system-wide consultations. I intend to issue the Uniform Policy as a Secretary-General's bulletin later this year.

39. An incident reporting form and associated guidance have been developed to ensure uniformity and consistency in the collection of information on allegations across the system. The form, which is to be used by authorized United Nations personnel only, is aimed at initiating a formal process in response to an allegation or report, which may result in, inter alia, the provision of assistance and other appropriate action, such as an administrative investigation and/or a referral for criminal investigation. The form will be used on the basis of "do no harm" and respect for confidentiality and informed consent. Since November 2017, the form and related guidance have been field-tested by all United Nations system entities operating in the Democratic Republic of Congo, with training designed and provided by the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS). Once finalized, it will be issued for use at all duty stations across the system.

40. Since 2016, formal or informal community-based complaint reception mechanisms have been established in all peace operations. Awareness-raising and outreach on those mechanisms are conducted jointly by conduct and discipline teams and United Nations partners. Capacity-building for those receiving complaints must continue, including to ensure compliance with human rights principles, in particular the principle of confidentiality. In 2017, MINUSCA expanded community-based reporting networks to regional field locations and provided training, toolkits and other guidance to designated focal points. In South Sudan, the Gender-Based Violence Information Management System introduced mandatory reporting and referral of allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse involving United Nations personnel and/or implementing partners, so as to ensure prompt and appropriate action. I encourage the adoption of this approach in all geographical contexts to foster accountability and prevent re-engagement of those associated with allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse in United Nations activities.

41. I have asked that all allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse involving non-United Nations system entities that are affiliated or have a relationship with the Organization, including "implementing partners" and contractors, be reported to me. We must ensure that those reports are investigated by the appropriate authority and that the appropriate accountability mechanisms are in place.

2. Strengthened investigations

42. I continue to encourage Member States to ensure that, where there are allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse, national investigations officers with sufficient experience and expertise are promptly appointed and deployed. I also urge Member States to ensure that investigations meet international standards and to conduct joint investigations with the United Nations.

43. In partnership with Member States, the United Nations continues to support the capacity-building and training of national investigations officers. The first training programme on the investigation of allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse, a joint Department of Field Support and OIOS initiative, supported by Member State funding, was conducted in January 2018.[9]

44. I have requested United Nations system entities to strengthen their investigative methods and processes, including by pooling investigative capacities. Further development of common investigative standards and practices across the system is required, as are greater protection measures for victims and witnesses, in order to

[9] The training is being coordinated by the Department of Field Support and is being planned, developed and delivered by OIOS.

improve the overall quality of investigations and ensure compliance with international human rights and other standards.

45. Under the auspices of the United Nations Representatives of Investigative Services, a task force is developing principles and guidelines concerning investigations of sexual exploitation and abuse aimed at harmonizing standards, aligning methods, ensuring consistency and integrating a victim-centred approach. OIOS is reviewing and improving its investigative methods so as to prioritize victims' rights and needs, with due respect for confidentiality and informed consent, particularly in the conduct of interviews and the collection of evidence. OIOS conducts interviews in private spaces, which are conducted by gender-balanced investigative teams, whenever possible, and makes a support person available during interviews. Referrals to appropriate services are made. Allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse are prioritized for investigation and strict benchmarks for completion are outlined. Immediate response teams are trained to preserve critical and time-sensitive evidence. OIOS and UNICEF, with the participation of UNDP, developed and delivered a training course on conducting forensic interviews of children.

3. Improved follow-up and accountability

46. Where sexual exploitation and abuse are attributed to members of national contingents, troop-contributing countries retain jurisdiction and accountability processes are mostly conducted in the countries of the alleged perpetrators. Where an investigation by the United Nations reveals credible allegations against officials or experts on mission, I refer the matter to the relevant national authorities for appropriate action and advise that the Organization stands ready to cooperate with any subsequent investigation and/or criminal prosecution.

47. Member State engagement is critical in following up on cases referred for criminal accountability. We are developing more transparent and expeditious channels of communication to keep all stakeholders informed of steps taken to realize accountability. We engage with Member States to improve information-sharing and the follow-up on cases referred to the United Nations by national authorities, as well as in cases for which follow-up information on the status of any investigation or proceeding has not been provided or remains pending.

4. Non-United Nations forces

48. In its resolutions 71/278 and 71/297, the General Assembly affirmed that Member States should take appropriate steps to investigate allegations involving non-United Nations forces, hold perpetrators accountable and provide adequate assistance and support to victims. I welcome Member States' efforts to strengthen measures to eradicate sexual exploitation and abuse by personnel of non-United Nations forces authorized under a Security Council mandate.

49. However, the United Nations continues to face challenges in following up on such allegations with Member States. We must work together to establish or strengthen standardized measures, procedures and cooperation modalities, on the basis of lessons learned and best practices from the procedures and cooperation modalities agreed between the Organization and United Nations troop- and police-contributing countries. We must develop measures for collaboration and information-sharing on investigations and associated judicial processes (while respecting confidentiality); such measures will allow the United Nations to assess developments and provide the necessary support and information to victims.

50. I recognize, however, that unless specifically mandated by the Security Council, challenges will remain as regards the consistent application of measures and

cooperation with the United Nations by non-United Nations forces. I urge Member States to make this call systematically when authorizing or renewing the mandates of non-United Nations forces and to explore further options for ensuring enforcement, including through the endorsement of a special protocol outlining minimum standards for protection from sexual exploitation and abuse by non-United Nations forces authorized under a Security Council mandate.

51. In the context of the Joint United Nations-African Union Framework for Enhanced Partnership in Peace and Security, a human rights compliance and accountability framework for African Union peace support operations, which will also address protection from sexual exploitation and abuse, is being developed. In August 2017, the Department of Field Support and OHCHR met with the African Union Commission to exchange experiences on compliance with international human rights law and international humanitarian law and to finalize the African Union draft policies on conduct and discipline and the prevention of and response to sexual exploitation and abuse. A subsequent consultative workshop outlined the mechanisms required for effective accountability for violations, including violations involving sexual exploitation and abuse, during deployments of African Union peace support operations. The United Nations is committed to continuing to work with the African Union as it develops policies and tools for screening, risk mitigation, case management and other measures.

C. Engagement with Member States

52. In September 2017, I convened a high-level meeting on measures for protection from sexual exploitation and abuse. The meeting provided an opportunity for Heads of State and/or Government, heads of international and regional organizations, civil society partners and the leadership of the United Nations to signal their solidarity and commitment to eradicate this scourge. I was proud to present the voluntary compact on preventing and addressing sexual exploitation and abuse, a visible demonstration of partnership and mutual commitment between the United Nations and Member States that support peace operations on the ground formally. To date, 86 Member States are signatories of the compact. I encourage others to consider signing it and I will continue to engage with Member States on the implementation of the commitments it contains, through briefings and other opportunities to discuss ongoing challenges and the sharing of best practices.

53. At the meeting, I also presented the circle of leadership on the prevention of and response to sexual exploitation and abuse in United Nations operations, established as a means for Heads of State and Government to demonstrate their collective resolve at the highest political level. To date, 58 leaders have joined the circle and it remains open for membership. I intend to work with them on a robust programme of engagement on the many initiatives under way across the system, including on acting as advocates for victims and identifying best practices. I propose that a meeting of the circle of leadership be convened on the margins of the seventy-third session of the General Assembly in order to take stock of progress and chart a course for the future.

D. Engagement with civil society

54. Civil society and humanitarian organizations are essential partners in our efforts to address sexual exploitation and abuse, both on the ground and in policymaking. They are often on the frontlines of protecting and providing life-saving assistance to vulnerable communities, and are a critical interface between affected communities

and the United Nations system, as they frequently assist affected individuals who report allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse.

55. I have engaged with a range of civil society actors working on this issue, including grass-roots community groups, faith-based organizations, youth groups and legal aid groups. Three round tables were convened in 2017 with civil society, in Geneva and New York, to discuss best practices; similar encounters were organized in early 2018 and will continue to be held throughout the year.

56. I am inspired by what has been achieved in communities around the world to empower and support victims. Accordingly, I am establishing an advisory board of leading civil society figures and experts in a range of relevant fields and from across all regions to provide me with advice on measures to strengthen prevention and responses, including possible strategies, policies, guidance, programmes and tools.

E. Improving strategic communications for education and transparency

57. Improving our strategic communications is critical for preventing and combating sexual exploitation, as well as and increasing awareness of risk factors. Much more can, and should, be done to increase awareness among communities of the conduct and behaviour they should expect from United Nations personnel. Accordingly, I have invited United Nations Television to work with my Special Coordinator and the Victims' Rights Advocate to develop a documentary on the causes and impact of sexual exploitation and abuse and to chronicle the efforts the Organization has made in partnership with Member States and civil society around the world.

58. Great strides have been made in improving transparency and access to information. In March 2017, the Department of Field Support upgraded its website on conduct and discipline in peace operations by providing an overview of the measures taken to address misconduct by United Nations field personnel, including a section on combating sexual exploitation and abuse. The website will be made available in all official languages during 2018. In August 2017, the Department of Public Information launched a dedicated website on the system-wide response to sexual exploitation and abuse, drawing on information and resources across all United Nations system entities, and initiated a system-wide internal communications campaign, including a dedicated page on the Secretariat's main intranet site, iSeek, which has been replicated by other entities. Outreach to local populations has included discussions, public service announcements and communications by text message, as well as digital campaigns.

59. My Special Coordinator continued to engage with Member States in the development of a repository of national laws on sexual exploitation and abuse, which now includes input from 39 Member States and will continue to be updated.

60. We are also exploring the development of a mobile application, with pro bono support from Ericsson and the World Childhood Foundation, to digitize and make accessible all relevant existing United Nations policies and standards of conduct, training materials and tools on combating sexual exploitation and abuse, including measures to strengthen reporting and information-sharing among relevant actors.

V. Overview of data on allegations

61. I have included comprehensive additional information on a total of 138 allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse relating to personnel in peacekeeping and special political missions, other United Nations system entities and non-United Nations forces authorized by a Security Council mandate, covering the period 1 January to 31 December 2017, which is available online.[10]

1. Peacekeeping and special political missions

62. In summary, 62 allegations were reported against personnel deployed in 10 peacekeeping missions and one political mission in 2017.[11] Each allegation may involve one or more victims and one or more alleged perpetrators. Of those, 41 allegations involved 101 military personnel, 10 involved 23 police personnel and 11 involved 11 civilian personnel, with a total of 130 victims (21 girls and 109 women). Of the 62 allegations, 20 allegations are related to sexual abuse and 42 to sexual exploitation, with 23 allegations of the total associated with paternity claims and another claim awaiting confirmation of the birth of a child. Details of each allegation are available online from https://conduct.unmissions.org.

63. It should be noted that the number of cases of sexual abuse, as a proportion of all allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse (32 per cent) has diminished since 2017 (55 per cent of all allegations), and this lower proportion of cases of sexual abuse is more in line with the percentage of such allegations observed in earlier years.

64. The data indicate a decrease in the number of allegations recorded in 2017 compared with the 104 allegations reported in 2016.[12] Of the allegations reported in 2017, 53 per cent related to events in 2017 and 47 per cent to events from previous years, as far back as 2003. There was a decrease in allegations recorded for MINUSCA (19, in comparison to 52 in 2016). Increases in allegations recorded for the United Nations Mission in Liberia and the United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH) may be attributable to the outreach efforts towards local communities prior to the closure of those missions.

65. Of the 62 allegations received in 2017, 61 were referred for investigation and one allegation remained under review at the end of the reporting period. Investigations into 20 allegations received in 2017 were completed, with 14 allegations substantiated and six unsubstantiated. Investigations into 41 allegations recorded in 2017 remained pending at 31 January 2018. Results of investigations were received for matters pending from 2016 and earlier, indicating 14 substantiated and 19 unsubstantiated allegations for 2016, and four substantiated and three unsubstantiated allegations for 2015. As of 31 January 2018, the results of investigations into 58 allegations from 2016 and earlier (39 for 2016, 15 for 2015, 1 for 2014 and 3 for 2013) remain to be communicated by 18 troop-contributing countries.[13] Investigations conducted by the United Nations have been completed for all allegations from 2016 or earlier.

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[10] See https://delegate.un.int/dgacm/delegate.nsf/caOpenPortal.xsp.

[11] A further 34 more allegations were recorded by OIOS but not included in the present report for the following reasons: there was insufficient information to proceed with an investigation with regard to 20 reports; 8 allegations involved sexual assaults among United Nations personnel, but not with beneficiaries of assistance; 3 allegations involved sexual harassment, a paternity claim, or the breaking of local laws, respectively, without indication of sexual exploitation and abuse; 2 allegations involved conduct in violation of non-fraternization policies, without indication of sexual exploitation or abuse; and 1 allegation was covered by a previously reported allegation.

[12] One allegation was added to the total reported for 2016 (A/71/818 and A/71/818/Corr.1).

[13] Democratic Republic of the Congo (22), Republic of the Congo (8), Cameroon (4), Burundi (3),

66. For substantiated allegations involving civilian personnel, recorded in 2017 and earlier, allegations against five individuals were referred to the Office of Human Resources Management for disciplinary action, and allegations relating to two individuals were referred to the United Nations Volunteers programme (UNV); credible allegations of criminal conduct against one individual were referred to a Member State by the Office of Legal Affairs. For substantiated allegations involving police and military personnel from 2017 and earlier, the United Nations took administrative action in respect of 25 military personnel and two police personnel, with repatriations on disciplinary grounds and the barring of those personnel from participating in future field missions. Those matters were also referred to the relevant Member States for appropriate disciplinary or criminal accountability measures. In 2017, Member States informed the United Nations of action taken in connection with 21 substantiated allegations recorded in 2017 or earlier (2 in 2010, 1 in 2011, 2 in 2012, 2 in 2013, 1 in 2014, 5 in 2015, 6 in 2016 and 2 in 2017). Measures ranged from administrative measures to imprisonment. A total of 27 allegations reported between 2010 and 2016 and substantiated by investigations are pending with 17 Member States,[14] as opposed to 31 allegations reported between 2010 and 2015 pending at the end of 2016. Details of measures taken by the United Nations or by Member States on allegations received between 2010 and 2017 appear on https://conduct.unmissions.org.

2. Other United Nations system entities and their implementing partners

67. In 2017, 75 allegations were reported against personnel in entities other than peacekeeping operations and special political missions,[15] an increase from the 42 reported in 2016. Among those 75 allegations, 25 involved implementing partners (see para. 10 above). The allegations involved 34 victims of sexual abuse (20 girls, 3 boys, 9 women and 2 men) and 45 victims of sexual exploitation (8 girls, 36 women and 1 unknown victim).

3. Non-United Nations forces

68. One allegation of sexual violence, relating to one woman victim, by non-United Nations forces operating under a Security Council mandate was brought to the attention of the United Nations in 2017, a substantial decrease from the 20 allegations reported in 2016. This decrease may be attributable to changes in context, including the withdrawal or reduction of forces and reduced contact between forces and communities. There are also challenges in receiving allegations, with OHCHR capacity for gathering information dependent on the existence of a field presence or a human rights component in a peace operation, access to areas where violations may occur and on concerns for the safety and security of victims and staff.

Gabon (3), Rwanda (police-contributing country; 3), Chad (2), Niger (2), Uruguay (2), Benin (1), Burkina Faso (1), Canada (police-contributing country; 1), Ghana (1), Malawi (1), Nigeria (1), Pakistan (1), Senegal (1) and South Africa (1).

[14] Niger (4), Chad (3), South Africa (3), Republic of the Congo (2), Nigeria (2), Senegal (2), Bangladesh (1), Cameroon (1), Canada (1), Democratic Republic of the Congo (1), Guinea (1), Guinea-Bissau (1), Madagascar (1), Mali (1), Mauritania (1), Togo (1) and United Republic of Tanzania (1).

[15] UNHCR (39), International Organization for Migration (IOM) (9), UNICEF (8), UNRWA (8), UNFPA (3), WFP (3), UNOPS (2), International Residual Mechanism for Criminal Tribunals (1), Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (1) and UN-Women (1). Most of these entities have field operations from which these allegations were reported

VI. Conclusions and recommendations

69. I am keenly aware of the unique responsibility of the United Nations to set global standards, from prevention to response, in confronting sexual exploitation and abuse by those serving under the United Nations flag. This fight remains one of my priorities and I will continue to do everything within my authority to ensure that the United Nations has its own house in order, including by increasing cooperation and the coordination of our efforts at Headquarters and in the field. The data suggest that there is a downward trend in the number of allegations reported in 2017, but we will continue to strengthen complaint mechanisms so as to enable victims to come forward, as well enhance investigative and follow-up procedures.

70. Of fundamental importance is the alignment between data collection and reporting methods system-wide. A common standard and method must be developed and applied across all entities so that allegations are reported in the same way and the data are easily consolidated and accessible. I have requested that all relevant entities finalize this ongoing work by the end of 2018.

71. We must also increase transparency across the system. The tools for disseminating information on and tracking credible allegations must be improved. The system-wide website must consolidate this information in a manner that is easily accessible and understandable to all. Information-sharing across the system must be stepped up. We must enhance our strategic communications and outreach measures directed at United Nations staff, local populations, the international community, civil society and the media, to ensure that they spell out what is expected of personnel who serve with the United Nations. We must also make efforts to confront and address the stigma and discrimination that victims often face.

72. I will continue to build partnerships with Member States, civil society and the private sector, drawing on their expertise. The United Nations has much to learn from what has been accomplished in countries around the world. Member States continue to innovate, promulgating legislation and establishing programmes to combat sexual exploitation and abuse. I encourage them to share their experiences and best practices, in particular as regards measures to assist and support victims. To that end, I will strengthen engagement with the circle of leadership and the signatories of the voluntary compact.

73. I will work with Member States to combat impunity and hold perpetrators accountable. I encourage Member States to promptly deploy national investigations officers when allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse arise, to ensure that investigations meet international standards and to agree to joint investigations with the United Nations. I will strengthen our internal investigations, communications and follow-up on accountability processes with Member States. I renew my call on Member States to consider extending extraterritorial jurisdiction over crimes that may be committed by their nationals when assigned to the United Nations or operating under its authority.

74. Above all, we must recognize that responses to sexual exploitation and abuse will have little impact if we fail to address the root causes and risk factors. The United Nations often operates in complex environments, marked by ongoing conflict, violence and insecurity, poverty and inequality, as well as a range of human rights violations, including high incidence of sexual and gender-based violence. Weak State institutions, in particular justice systems, exacerbate these factors and can contribute to a climate of impunity.

75. United Nations efforts to prevent and combat sexual exploitation and abuse cannot be fragmented. They must be fully integrated into the Organization's work to

promote and protect human rights, contribute to peace and security and promote sustainable development.

76. I am committed to exploring and consulting with Member States formally and informally, including through the circle of leadership, on how our efforts can be strengthened and addressed holistically across the three pillars of the United Nations and integrated into the work to realize the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

77. I invite Member States to reflect on this and to share perspectives at a meeting I will convene on the margins of the general debate of the seventy-third session of the General Assembly.